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RWANDA



SUCCESS STORY

Weaving Baskets Provides Rwandan Women with New Hope



PEPFAR-Gahaya Links partnership trains 120 Rwandan women in weaving export-quality baskets and links them to a market for their product, creating opportunities for generating income and thus reducing the chance of women's engaging in high risk behavior to support themselves and their families.



Photo Source: FHI/ROADS

Illuminée Mukarushema, a 31 year old mother of four was abandoned by her husband 13 years ago and has since fended for herself and her family. She tells that “as the only person to take care of the family, I engaged in prostitution in order to survive.” In 2007, she joined a cooperative that trained her in basket making but was unable to find a market for the baskets that she produced. Illuminée had to continue prostitution to support her family. In 2008 Illuminée was one of the 120 women who joined the Gahaya Links training initiated by Family Health International (FHI) as part of the Regional Outreach Addressing AIDS through Development Strategies (ROADS) funded through the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

The ROADS Project provides at-risk communities with resources, tools and skills to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS and creates alternative opportunities for generating income for these people. The project targets mobile and vulnerable populations along the major transport corridors and border towns of east and central Africa. In 2008, the project entered into a partnership with the Gahaya Links, a local company specializing in Rwandan basket trade, with the aim to provide income opportunities for 120 poor women like Illuminée by training them in the art of basket weaving and ensuring a market for their products. These export quality baskets are sold to department and retail stores in the U.S. In addition to the basket making skills, the women also received social and health information on topics such as hygiene, gender based violence and HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Income from the project has made a huge difference to these women and their families, who used to struggle to get by on less than a dollar a day. The extra money is used to buy food, clothing, school uniforms and other items that were previously out of their reach.

“Now, I'm convinced that I will change the sense of my life, I have where to sell my products, I have to produce and receive safe income which will help my family to survive. No prostitution again. I have been tested for HIV, I'm not infected and I will never be infected, because I'm going to live not by prostitution but by my hand baskets,” says Illuminée.

Telling Our Story
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